

Press Room



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
December 3, 2003

CONTACT: Mike Marando, OTS
(916) 262-2975

HIDDEN DANGERS

By Sunne Wright McPeak

Secretary, California Business, Transportation & Housing Agency

Anyone who drives the freeways in California during the morning or evening commute knows how frustrating it can be — sitting in traffic, aggressive drivers, tailgaters and a multitude of other traffic sins that make us crazy on a daily basis.

Many Californians have just come to accept these ills as part of life in the Golden State. But there is a serious traffic safety problem that is not as obvious and you don't necessarily see every day. It may take the form of your coworker heading home after the company holiday party or your best friend after happy hour. Or maybe it's you on New Years Eve and you have not made arrangements for a ride home. That hidden threat is drunk drivers.

Alcohol-related crashes have increased in California for the fourth consecutive year after more than a decade of decline. We're not alone. The same thing is happening on the national level. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 41 percent of all fatal crashes involved alcohol in 2002. Why the slide backward? Our population is growing, we're experiencing an increase in teen drivers and unfortunately, many people mistakenly continue to dismiss impaired driving as if it were a speeding ticket. It's far from it.

Last year California experienced 1,416 fatalities and more than 32,000 injuries in alcohol-related crashes — up from 1,308 deaths and 31,806 injuries the year before. This is a very serious problem and we're doing something about it.

The Office of Traffic Safety through the Business, Transportation and Housing Agency is providing mini-grant funds to 100 local law enforcement agencies that join 25 regional Avoid programs, including 310 law enforcement agencies from Eureka to San Diego, to take part in sobriety checkpoints and saturation patrols designed to enforce the state's DUI laws during the holiday season. That includes staff time for more officers on the roads, support for regional sobriety checkpoints and new technology, including Portable Evidential Breath Test (PEBT) devices.

These tools assist traffic safety practitioners throughout California in removing impaired drivers from the road. California earned MADD's highest rating (B+) on its Rating the States DUI report card.

Thousands of law enforcement officers throughout the state are going to be working very hard to get as many drunk drivers off the roads as possible before they injure, kill or paralyze your wife, your brother, your best friend or your daughter. We would much rather prevent impaired driving before someone gets behind the wheel instead of cleaning it up on the backend with a body bag. Wouldn't you?